

Penelope (Penny) Abernathy, M.S., M.B.A.

Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics at UNC-Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill, NC, US

Penny Abernathy specializes in helping news organizations survive and thrive in today's digital media environment

Penelope (Penny) Muse Abernathy, a former executive at The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, is the Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics at the University of North Carolina. A journalism professional with more than 30 years of experience as a reporter, editor and senior media business executive, she specializes in preserving quality journalism by helping news organizations succeed economically in the digital environment. Her research focuses on the implications of the digital revolution for news organizations, the information needs of communities and the emergence of news deserts in the United States.

She is author of "The Expanding News Deserts," a major 2018 report that documents the decline and loss of local news organizations in the U.S., (available at usnewsdeserts.com), and lead co-author of "The Strategic Digital Media Entrepreneur" (Wiley Blackwell: 2018), which explores in-depth the emerging business models of successful media enterprises.

Her first book, "Saving Community Journalism: The Path to Profitability," (UNC Press: 2014) is based on five years of research, involving more than two dozen newspapers around the country. This research (available at savingcommunityjournalism.com) became the foundation for UNC's Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, which works with news organizations to investigate and develop new business models and tools. She was also author of a 2016 report, "The Rise of a New Media Baron and the Emerging Threat of News Deserts" (available at newspaperownership.com).

As a senior business executive, Abernathy was responsible for both creating and implementing strategies at some of the nation's most prominent news organizations and publishing companies, including the Harvard Business Review, as well as The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. She oversaw the successful launch of new multimedia enterprises that increased both revenue and profit at all three organizations. She also served as vice president and executive director of industry programs at the Paley Center for Media, which counts as its members some of the world's leading media companies and executives.

Before moving to the business side of the industry, Abernathy was a newspaper reporter and editor at several daily newspapers, including The Charlotte Observer, The Dallas Times-Herald and The Wichita Eagle-Beacon. She was inducted into the North Carolina Journalism Hall of Fame in 1998.

Media - Online, Education/Learning, Advertising/Marketing, Research

News Deserts, Community Journalism, Digital Media, Journalism

Columbia Business School
MBA Finance and Marketing

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
B.A. Journalism

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